HYBRID SLOT MACHINE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates generally to gaming machines and, more particularly, to a video-based slot machine designed to appeal to players of mechanical slot machines.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Slot machines generally include a plurality of symbol-bearing reels that are rotated and stopped to place symbols on the reels in visual association with one or more pay lines. If a combination of symbols along an active pay line represents a winning combination, the player is awarded a payout identified on a pay table for that winning combination. Slot machines are generally available in two different types. First, a video-based slot machine depicts the symbol-bearing reels on a video display. The number of simulated reels is typically five and the number of pay lines is typically at least five. Second, a mechanical slot machine includes mechanical (physical) slot reels driven by stepper motors. The number of mechanical reels is typically three and the number of pay lines is typically five or less.

[0003] Video-based slot machines and mechanical slot machines generally appeal to different segments of the market. Although many players are attracted to the complex and entertaining graphical images, animations, and play sequences afforded by video-based slot machines, many traditionalists are still drawn to mechanical slot machines because they are simplistic machines that often only pay on a single pay line and only require a pull of a handle to initiate a spin of the reels. If a player pulls the handle of a mechanical slot machine and the reels stop with a winning combination of symbols along the pay line, the player is awarded a payout.

[0004] It would beneficial to increase the popularity of video-based slot machines because of the advantages provided by such machines. Video-based slot machines allow for flexibility in game design and multi-denominational play and do not require any additional hardware for implementing bonus games. With respect to flexibility in game design, the video display of a video-based slot machine can depict complex and entertaining graphical images, animations, and play sequences that cannot be employed in mechanical slot machines. With respect to flexibility in multi-denominational play, the game (e.g., reel symbol distribution and pay table) can easily be modified to vary the theoretical payback percentage in response to a player's selection of different coin denominations for game play. Such game modifications are not easily made to mechanical slot machines. Further, video-based slot machines do not require any additional hardware for implementing bonus games because the bonus game may be depicted on the primary video display and executed by the same game controller used to execute the video slot game. Mechanical slot machines, on the other hand, require such additional hardware as a secondary video display to implement bonus games.

[0005] To increase the popularity of video-based slot machines, efforts have been made to promote such machines at gaming establishments and in print advertising mediums. Despite such efforts, many traditionalists remain loyal to mechanical slot machines and generally avoid video-based slot machines. In order to draw such traditionalists to video-based slot machines, a need exists for a hybrid slot machine that would appeal to players of mechanical slot machines and act as a steppingstone from mechanical to video-based slot machines.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] A hybrid slot machine, controlled by a processor in response to a wager, comprises a video display and a generally flat panel mounted over the video display. The video display is operable to depict a plurality of symbol-bearing reels that are rotated and stopped to place symbols on the reels in visual association with at least one pay line. The flat panel forms one or more transmissive reel windows overlying and revealing the respective reels shown on the video display.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] The foregoing and other advantages of the invention will become apparent upon reading the following detailed description and upon reference to the drawings in which:

[0008] **FIG. 1** is a perspective view of a hybrid slot machine embodying the present invention with a portion of a flat panel broken away to reveal a video display;

[0009] **FIG. 2** is a side view of the hybrid slot machine with a portion broken away to reveal the relationship between the flat panel and the video display;

[0010] **FIG. 3** is a block diagram of a control system suitable for operating the hybrid slot machine;

[0011] **FIG. 4** is a front view of the video display by itself;

[0012] **FIG. 5** is a front view of the flat panel by itself;

[0013] **FIG. 6** is a front view of the flat panel mounted over the video display with the video display depicting a basic slot game; and

[0014] **FIG. 7** is a front view of the flat panel mounted over the video display with the video display depicting a bonus game.

[0015] While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific embodiments have been shown by way of example in the drawings and will be described in detail herein. However, it should be understood that the invention is not intended to be limited to the particular forms disclosed. Rather, the invention is to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS

[0016] Turning now to the drawings and referring initially to **FIGS. 1 and 2**, a video-based hybrid slot machine **10** comprises a video display **12** and a generally flat panel **14** mounted over the video display **12**. In the illustrated embodiment, the slot machine **10** is an "upright" version in which the video display **12** is oriented vertically relative to the player. Alternatively, the slot machine **10** may be a "slant-top" version in which the video display **12** is slanted at about a thirty-degree angle toward the player of the slot